



WISCONSIN

**DEPARTMENT OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

Division of Economic Support  
Bureau of Welfare Initiatives

**TO: Economic Support Supervisors  
Economic Support Lead Workers  
Training Staff  
FSET Administrative and Provider Agencies  
Child Care Coordinators  
W-2 Agencies**

**BWI OPERATIONS MEMO**

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**SUBJECT: FAMILY CASE MANAGEMENT IN W-2**

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**CROSS REFERENCE:** Wisconsin Works (W-2) Manual, Chapter 14  
Wisconsin Works Case Management Resource Guide  
Case Management Strategies Training Guide

**PURPOSE**

The purpose of this memo is to increase awareness of the importance of fathers in the family, focus on family case management for all Wisconsin Works (W-2) households and facilitate W-2 agency level outreach efforts to provide case management services to noncustodial parents.

**BACKGROUND**

In August 1998, Governor Thompson launched the Wisconsin Fatherhood Initiative, an effort to shine the spotlight on fathers - their importance in the lives of their children and what the community can do to encourage their greater involvement. These efforts focus on all fathers, including fathers in two-parent families, teen fathers, noncustodial fathers (both divorced and never married), and single-parent fathers.

Activities are guided by the following principles:

1. All fathers can be important contributors to the well-being of their children.
2. Parents are partners in raising their children, even when they do not live in the same household.
3. The roles fathers play in families are diverse and related to cultural and community norms.
4. Men should receive the education and support necessary to prepare them for the responsibility of parenthood.
5. Government can encourage and promote father involvement through its programs and through its own workforce policies.

W-2 is based on the philosophy that both parents are responsible to care for and support their children. Each parent, whether in a two-parent family or not, has a role and responsibility to fill toward their children. W-2 is designed to provide opportunities for both parents to help them provide for their family and meet these responsibilities.

## **TWO-PARENT HOUSEHOLDS**

Fathers are not only an important source of financial support for their families, they also provide psychological and emotional support to the mothers and serve as role models for their children. Both parents teach children which behaviors are acceptable and which are not. Studies indicate that while fathers spend more of their time playing with their children, mothers spend a greater proportion of their time in caretaking activities.

The goal of the W-2 two-parent policy is to assist families to effectively use the resources of both parents to achieve self-sufficiency. When working with a two-parent family, the Financial and Employment Planner (FEP) must carefully assess the skills and abilities of each parent, the family circumstances, and the activities needed to prepare each parent for unsubsidized employment.

With this in mind, the FEP should take a family case management approach. Meetings with both parents in a two-parent household may be necessary to assess total family strengths and barriers. It is important to remember that the other parent in a two-parent family not receiving federally funded child care can not be required to participate in W-2. However, if both parents are assigned to activities, employability plans must be completed for both and the activities identified for each parent should be designed with the goal of achieving family sufficiency.

## **NONCUSTODIAL PARENTS**

Fathers play an important role in households and their absence in a household has many effects, including:

1. Their contribution to the family income is reduced
2. Their role as caretaker and role model to their children is sharply reduced
3. Their role as supporter to the mother is reduced
4. The quality and nature of their relationship with their children may be changed.

Since single parent families are more likely to be poor than two-parent families, especially if the custodial parent is the mother, just payment of child support can help make a difference in the children's lives.

One of the goals of W-2 is to enable custodial parents to become self-sufficient by ensuring regular child support payments in combination with employment. For this reason, W-2 agencies should work with noncustodial parents to assist them in obtaining employment and increase their ability to make child support payments. In a study of 289 single, teen-mother families on Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) in Wisconsin, the father's work experience was the strongest predictor of the father remaining involved in the child's life. This may be due to the fact that both mothers and fathers may hold the belief that a sign of a good father is one that can provide for his family. Therefore, a father who is employed may have a greater sense of pride in his ability to be a father and the mother may be more willing to let an employed father remain involved in the child's life. Providing case management services to the noncustodial parent will assist them in meeting their financial obligation and facilitate enhanced contact and emotional investment with their child(ren).

When working with a single parent family, the FEP must assess the abilities of the custodial parent and the activities needed to prepare that parent for unsubsidized employment. However, it is important not to overlook the role of the noncustodial parent in this family situation. Since both parents should share responsibility for the children, FEPs should take a family case management approach even though the noncustodial parent is not in the household.

Although participation in W-2 by the noncustodial parent is voluntary, FEPs should explain available noncustodial parent services to the custodial parent and give them a copy of the W-2 Fact Sheet

**“Services for Noncustodial Parents”** (DES-10985-P). The agency may also consider sending a notice of available services to the noncustodial parent, encouraging contact with the FEP if interested in accessing available services.

The W-2 agency may provide job search assistance, job skills training, basic education, and/or work experience opportunities to eligible noncustodial parents. FEPs should refer to the **W-2 Case Management Resource Guide** for suggestions on assisting the noncustodial parent with job seeking/job retention skills training, ongoing assessment, partnering with community resources and encouraging family support. The intent of these services is to motivate noncustodial parents to pay child support by assisting them in locating employment and to support their involvement in their children's lives.

Concurrent with case management, job search, and employment and training assistance, a successful program creates a balance between family and work to provide a stable environment which benefits the child(ren), the custodial parent and the noncustodial parent. In the end, fostering positive father-child relationships may contribute to greater financial support as well.

## **MINOR PARENTS**

Although minor parents living outside an adult supervised living arrangement are not eligible to receive cash assistance under W-2, W-2 agencies should also put special emphasis on providing case management services to minor parents, regardless of their income, assets, or living arrangement.

All minor parents (under the age of 18, male or female) are eligible to meet with a FEP and receive W-2 case management services. These services could include discussions on family planning, money and time-management, career planning, and parenting and independent living skills. The FEP should also provide information regarding available child care services, high school and school-to-work preparation, community resources, and eligibility for food stamps, other food and nutrition programs and Medicaid.

## **SUMMARY**

W-2 agencies should encourage the involvement of both parents in the care, support and development of their children. One of the goals of W-2 is to strengthen the responsibility of both parents to care for their children by providing work and training opportunities for both.

Case Management Strategies, an enhanced case management course, offers practical approaches to working with custodial and noncustodial parents. FEPs should take a family case management approach with all participants, ensuring services are offered to both parents regardless of whether they are two-parent or single-parent households.

Wisconsin Works is about more than making a better living - it's about making a better life.